



# Conserving the Everglades for America

## Ecological Services Office, Partners Coordinate for Restoration Success

Since 1955, the South Florida Ecological Services Office in Vero Beach has been charged, in one form or another, with protecting and recovering the natural environment of the region.



*With a nationwide population estimated at a million, the Florida alligator may be found wherever suitable habitat is found. They seek shallow bodies of water, marshes or swamps. They are not endangered like their relative the American crocodile. They eat—anything. Anything small enough to swallow.*

*Photo courtesy of SFWMD.*

No ecological challenge is greater than that of the Everglades Restoration. We are currently partnered with a variety of federal and state agencies as well as nongovernmental organizations in our vigorous effort to conserve America's Everglades.

Our staff recognizes this effort, as do many others, as the largest restoration effort in the world and presents a challenge to all involved agencies and groups.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, recognizing the unprecedented scope and complexity of this endeavor, started, in 1994, by seeking necessary resources to meet the new challenges.

This led to the Vero Beach office getting Everglades Restoration budgetary support both through additional appropriations to the Department of the Interior's budget and also through increased funding transferred from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to assist with water resource planning in accordance with the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act.

As a result, the office has grown from a staff of about 25 people in 1999 to more than 100 biologists, hydrologists, engineers, and other professional support staff in 2004. The range of our expertise has also broadened, allowing more comprehensive participation in conservation efforts.

The majority of the recent expansion has been to assemble expertise in fish and wildlife science to serve in CERP Restoration, Coordination and Verification Program (RECOVER) and the many project delivery teams (PDTs) that are formulating the plans to carry out the restoration outlined in CERP.

Simultaneously we improved our leadership status as experts in conservation of fish and wildlife resources in South Florida. We currently participate in all six RECOVER teams, we tri-chair three of the RECOVER teams and co-chair the team developing interim goals for restoration.

Our overall CERP program is divided into the following seven teams:

- Northern/Lake Okeechobee
- Central/Upper East Coast
- Southern/Florida Bay
- West Coast/Southwest
- Lower East Coast
- System-Wide and
- Engineering Support



*Wide expansive flatlands and narrow, swamp-like waterways epitomize today's Everglades. More than 18,000 square miles, nine-million acres of wetlands provide one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world. The State of Florida and the federal government will combine to pay nearly \$8-billion in the next 30+ years for its restoration.*

*Photo courtesy of SFWMD.*



*The Florida panther, a sub species of the mountain lion, is one of the most endangered large mammals in the world. It is also Florida's state animal. A small population lives in South Florida and represents the only known population of an animal that once ranged throughout the southeastern United States. Photo courtesy of SFWMD.*

These efforts are augmented by a fish and wildlife biologist serving as liaison to the Jacksonville District of the Corps of Engineers, located in Jacksonville.

The Endangered Species portion of our work involves several elements. First, the Service must make appropriate decisions on listing, reclassifying and de-listing under the Endangered Species Act. For example, the Service conducts consultations on all federal actions that may affect listed species. We review proposals and support recovery related research and on-the-ground recovery actions.

The Multi-Species Recovery Plan (MSRP) continues to serve as overall guidance for recovery efforts. It includes accounts on all of the 69 federally listed species present in South Florida, evaluates their recovery needs in the context of the native habitat types of the region, and outlines recovery tasks for both listed species and the ecosystems that support them. The MSRP is available on-line at our web site, <http://verobeach.fws.gov/Programs/Recovery/vbms5.html>.

### **Partnership Cooperation is Bedrock of Conservation Mission**

The South Florida Ecological Services Office has produced implementation schedules for the recovery actions and has formed sub-teams on particular issues, such as the sound scientific analysis supporting a conservation strategy for the Florida panther.

Our Environmental Contaminants program has grown in recent years in South Florida. Traditional roles include oil spill response and mosquito control practices that are both effective and environmentally friendly. The Service has coordinated with the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to establish a protocol for surveys and evaluations for toxic chemicals on lands slated for various water management projects under CERP.

In response to CERP workload, the South Florida Ecological Services Office increased its technical capabilities, not only in the area of environmental toxicology, but also in other fields beyond our previous areas of expertise, which was oriented toward fish and wildlife biology. We now have an engineering support group that allows us to better assist the Corps and the SFWMD in ecological issues during the hydrological modeling used to evaluate alternative plans for each of the CERP projects.

We are engaged in these planning efforts throughout the watershed, from the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes to the Florida Keys and southwest Florida.

In fiscal year 2003, the South Florida office was involved in all active projects and provided more than 2,700 informal consultations and technical assists to the Corps and other agencies.

We continue to provide assistance to the Corps in the development of the Monitoring and Assessment Plan and Interim Goals for CERP as well as providing leadership on a number of CERP related committees. In addition, we continue to be engaged in discussions with our many partners regarding appropriate methods to designate quantities of water to be reserved for the natural system in accordance with the provisions of the Water Resources Development Act of 2000 (WRDA 2000).

### **For more information, contact:**

Barry Rosen, Ph.D.  
Assistant Field Supervisor Everglades Restoration  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
South Florida Ecological Services Office  
1339 20th Street  
Vero Beach, FL 32960  
phone: 772/562 3909 x 299  
fax: 772/562 4288